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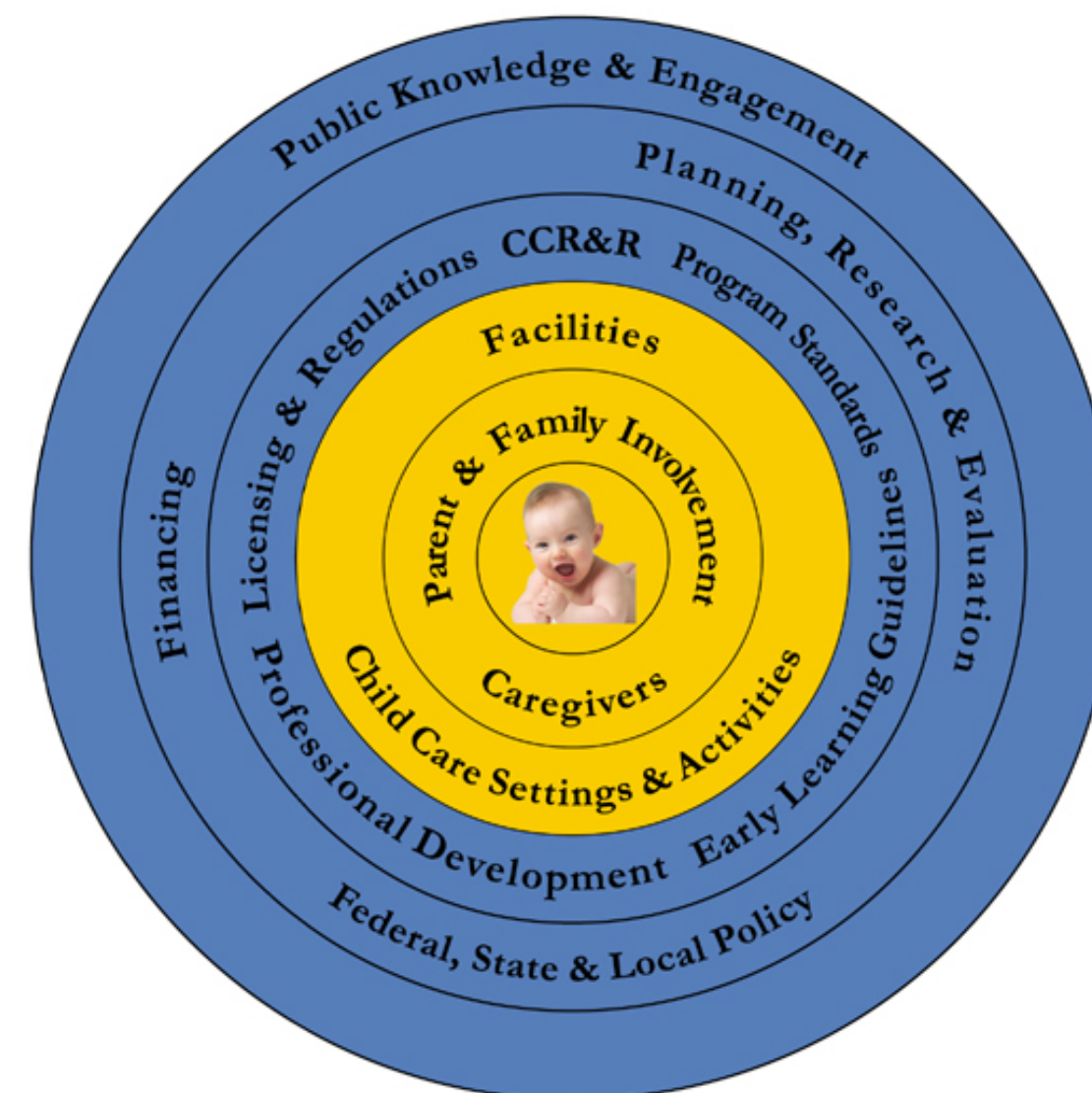
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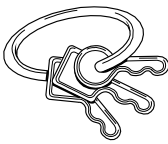


Early Care and Education Systems That Support Quality Care for Babies and Toddlers Key Elements



Infrastructure

Direct Services



Early Care and Education Systems that Support Quality Care for Babies and Toddlers

Key System Elements and Characteristics

The following is an overview of key system elements and their characteristics that reflect how an early care and education system can offer quality child care to infants, toddlers and their families:

Public Knowledge and Engagement

A public education and engagement strategy exists that informs the public about the importance of high quality care and builds support for improving the quality of infant and toddler child care.

Planning, Research and Evaluation

Planning efforts bring together a broad coalition of participants with interest and knowledge about infants and toddlers to determine what services and supports are most needed. Planning builds upon prior and current system development efforts. Research and evaluation are also used to assess infant and toddler child care demand, supply, quality, and available resources. Results are used to coordinate decisions about program development and the allocation of funds. Benchmarks are established and used to evaluate progress.

Financing

Financing is reexamined to review how existing resources are allocated, investigate how to add flexibility to categorical programs, get the most out of state and federal dollars, and create partnerships to find new funding sources. Funding for high quality infant and toddler child care is supported by public and private sources, including parents, employers, government, civic groups and foundations.

Federal, State and Local Policy

Policies support parental choice and involvement, and higher standards of care. Family leave policies allow parents the choice to be home with their babies and subsidy policies provide incentives for programs and providers that meet higher standards of care. Policies encourage and reward collaboration with related services and infant toddler earmark funds are used strategically and effectively.

Licensing and Regulations

Licensing and Regulations match the unique needs of infants and toddlers. Training requirements begin with health and safety, and incorporate knowledge and skills specific to infant and toddler care. Standards for providers and programs are high, and are supported by a consistent and rigorous monitoring and enforcement program.

Program Standards

Program Standards are research-based indicators of quality care that go beyond standards set forth by licensing and regulations. Examples of existing voluntary standards include state or national accreditation standards, those set forth by state quality rating systems and Early Head Start Performance Standards. The standards are applicable across program areas, including child care, Head Start and Part C services.

Early Learning Guidelines

Early Learning Guidelines are child outcomes for babies and toddlers that are flexible, age-appropriate and applicable across all child care settings. The guidelines provide a framework for continuity between home, child care, preschool and school. Training and education for all caregivers incorporate the guidelines. Materials are available for parents and informal caregivers that explain the guidelines and how they can be implemented in home settings.

Professional Development

Professional Development increases caregivers’ knowledge about infant and toddler development, and develops and maintains a cadre of individuals (e.g. infant toddler specialists) that can train providers on the latest developments in infant and toddler care. A core body of knowledge that infant and toddler providers must have is defined and a range of professional development opportunities that incorporate these core competencies is offered to caregivers in all settings. Caregivers’ knowledge is recognized with multi-level infant/toddler care credentials and funding is available to assist providers in getting additional education. Increased levels of training are rewarded with greater compensation.

Child Care Resource and Referral

Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies are equipped to address the needs of infants and toddlers, their families, and their caregivers. CCR&Rs provide parents and other consumers of infant and toddler child care with information about the indicators of quality care for children birth to three in all settings. The information is provided in a variety of formats, languages and reading levels that meet consumers’ needs. CCR&R services offer infant and toddler providers specialized support and assistance and use outreach to deliver training and support to caregivers in hard-to-reach home settings. A network of qualified infant and toddler specialists in CCR&R agencies works together to achieve quality improvement goals.

Child Care Settings and Activities

There is a range of high quality settings for infants and toddlers, including informal caregivers, family child care homes, and child care centers. All settings are recognized and supported by the early care and education system, and special efforts are made to reach and support informal providers. Comprehensive services, such as Early Head Start, are available in multiple settings to low income and vulnerable families. Activities with infants and toddlers occur in the context of relationships and are embedded in everyday routines. The interactions between the caregiver and the child support the child’s development and are informed by early learning guidelines.

Facilities

Caregivers and programs can expand their services to meet demand for infant and toddler care by making spaces for this age group, and they can improve their services to increase the quality of care available to infants and toddlers. Grant and loan programs exist, and technical assistance is available to help providers finance, design and implement appropriate environments for infants and toddlers.

Parent and Family Involvement

Information and support about infant and toddler development is available to parents and other family members involved in the child’s care. Parents are involved in planning and system development efforts and partner with caregivers to support the development of their children in child care.

Caregivers

Providers in all infant and toddler child care settings are knowledgeable, connected to resources and have access to training opportunities. This most commonly occurs in the context of the element of professional development.

Collaboration

Strong links exist between the components of the early care and education system and related systems. Developing partnerships is recognized as a necessity, and is done both informally and formally. Programs and caregivers that serve infants, toddlers, and families partner to share resources and expertise, improve services and make access easier. Collaboration is not represented graphically in the Initiative’s system model, but it is an integral component within each element if they are to function together as a system.